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| **January 9, 2009:** The successful Wal-Mart retail chain was established and built by the Walton family several decades ago in the United States. The success of this gigantic retail chain has received mixed reactions from the communities that it serves.   In some quarters, the chain has been described as a company that brings so many good things such as relatively everyday low prices for goods and services, jobs and infrastructure development; akin to being accused of bringing the communities they serve “embarrassment of riches”.  The era of the hyper-supermarket concept was introduced to Kenya about two decades ago with the rapid expansion of large retailers such as Uchumi and Nakumatt. In latter days, the competitive environment has been enhanced by the entry and expansion of local retailers such as Fairlane supermarkets and Tuskys.   The entry of these hyper-supermarkets was received with a lot of optimism by consumers because the concept of “everything under one roof”, which was typically a mainstay of Northern Hemisphere economies, was now a reality in Kenya. To this day, these hyper-supermarkets have continued to grow and expand their range of offerings to Kenyan consumers.  I was intrigued to learn from a friend who spent his festive holidays up-country that one of these large retail chains has opened an outlet in Meru town, and that construction is already underway to open another one in Nanyuki town.   Unlike previous visits to his up-country home where days were whiled away in local pubs and fast food joints, this time around he was able to have a cappuccino in the heart of his home town at one of the restaurants at the hyper-supermarket premises.   From now on, he also does not have to buy all his holiday provisions from Nairobi, but can buy everything he requires from the new hyper-market in town.  As he was narrating his refreshing experience, I was thinking of all that has been reported on the challenges that Wal-Mart has experienced in its expansion over the decades.   Initially received with a lot of enthusiasm by local American communities, it began to face increasing criticism over the contagion effects of expansion in the longer term.   Of particular note was the fact that small retailers, or what are referred to as “mom & pop shops”, gradually disappeared as customers shopping habits and preferences changed in favour of the large retailer.   Assuming that some events in Africa are mirroring trends in the West, we can predict with a  degree of accuracy that the expansion of hyper-supermarkets here will have more or less the same effects as those experienced in America.   Chances are that the competitive environment will change adversely for small retailers. Real estate prices will be affected in one way or another.  There will probably be a deflationary effect on prices initially; however, this will probably reverse when a monopolistic situation emerges after all the small retailers have run out of business.  The large retailers will characteristically try and win the hearts and minds of small town residents by convincing them of all the good things that they are likely to benefit such as creation of new jobs; establishment of social services such as education and healthcare; enhancement of infrastructure such as roads, energy and water systems.   This approach to business can be explained by two classic Chinese business strategies that are often cited to explain real life situations. The first strategy “Deceiving the sky to cross the sea” is commonly used as a ploy to create distraction.   The second strategy is “Tossing a brick in return for a jade” which is used to describe an unfair exchange of transactions, although typically for noble purpose. It reflects the ability of the strategist to extract more out of the exchange.  Today’s inflationary times have made it difficult to differentiate prices between small and large retailers. The effects on the consumer pocket are essentially the same. It is said that a fool and his money are soon parted. The rest of us wait until we reach the supermarket. |

BERLIN (Reuters) – Even the most quirky of computer nerds can learn to flirt with finesse thanks to a new "flirting course" being offered to budding IT engineers at Potsdam University south of Berlin.

The 440 students enrolled in the master's degree course will learn how to write flirtatious text messages and emails, impress people at parties and cope with rejection.

Philip von Senftleben, an author and radio presenter who will teach the course, summed up his job as teaching how to "get someone else's heart beating fast while yours stays calm."

The course, which starts next Monday, is part of the social skills section of the IT course and is designed to ease entry into the world of work. Students also learn body language, public-speaking, stress management and presentation skills.

"We want to prepare our students with the social skills needed to succeed both in their private life and their work life," said Hans-Joachim Allgaier, a spokesman for the institute at Potsdam University where the course is being offered.

It's not hard to tell when a guy is "happy to see you."

The twinkle in his eye, his swagger, that sexy smile - all are clear signs he's [in the mood](http://us.rd.yahoo.com/dailynews/livescience/sc_livescience/storytext/womencansmellamansintentions/30510040/SIG=1225sl606/*http:/www.livescience.com/strangenews/080610-bikini-effect.html).

And, at least subconsciously, a woman can also tell by the scent of his sweat, according to new research.

Scientists have long debated whether humans, like animals, use [chemical signals called pheromones](http://us.rd.yahoo.com/dailynews/livescience/sc_livescience/storytext/womencansmellamansintentions/30510040/SIG=11to3vd37/*http:/www.livescience.com/health/041104_sex_and_smell.html) to [communicate sexual interest](http://us.rd.yahoo.com/dailynews/livescience/sc_livescience/storytext/womencansmellamansintentions/30510040/SIG=1213uq755/*http:/www.livescience.com/humanbiology/060118_armpit_odor.html) to potential mates. Problem is, the effects of pheromones are thought to be subconscious - meaning that if we do communicate using them, we sure don't know it. It's also hard to know what these pheromones might be and how we sense them, so researchers understand little about them.

But if human pheromones are going to be anywhere, they're going to be in sweat, right? Denise Chen, a psychologist at Rice University in Houston, and her colleagues devised an experiment to compare how women respond to different forms of [male sweat](http://us.rd.yahoo.com/dailynews/livescience/sc_livescience/storytext/womencansmellamansintentions/30510040/SIG=11tjoii1g/*http:/www.livescience.com/health/060621_sweaty_cities.html) - sweat produced in everyday situations versus that produced when a man is turned on.

The researchers speculated that if humans do produce and respond to sweat pheromones, then a woman should respond to a guy's sexual sweat differently than she does to his normal sweat.

Chen and her colleagues asked 20 heterosexual guys to stop wearing deodorant and scented products for a few days. Then they told the men to put small pads in their armpits as they watched pornographic videos and became aroused (the researchers confirmed, using electrodes, that the images did the job). Later, the guys were asked to exchange those pads for fresh pads to collect the sweat they produced when they weren't aroused.

Then the researchers recruited 19 brave women to smell the men's pads while undergoing brain scans.

The investigators used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), a technique that reveals the brain regions a person is using at any given time - even if their brain activity is subconscious.

Sure enough, the women's brains responded very differently depending on which sweat they sniffed. (And no, none of them passed out.) The sexual sweat, but not the normal sweat, activated the right orbitofrontal cortex and the right fusiform cortex, brain areas that help us recognize emotions and perceive things, respectively. Both regions are in the right hemisphere, which is generally involved in smell, social response, and emotion.

The findings bolster the idea that humans do communicate via subconscious chemical signals, notes Chen in her study, which was published in the Dec. 31 issue of the Journal of Neuroscience.

Our sexual intentions, in other words, may be a lot clearer than we ever intended them to be. That crush you have on your co-worker? She may already know - at least subconsciously.